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SUBJECT: MFA GOSSIP ON POSSIBLE KEY DIPLOMATIC POSTINGS

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for Reasons 1.5(b,d).

¶1. (C) During a June 17 meeting on embassy property issues (septel), Ambassador Srood Najib (strictly protect), MFA Director for Americas Affairs, shared gossip on possible Iraqi Ambassadorial assignments to a number of key diplomatic posts. According to Ambassador Najib, those on the inside track include:

- Riyadh: Iraq's current Ambassador to Tokyo (listed in a recent MFA document as Ghanem Alwan al-Jamili)
- Abu Dhabi: the MFA's current Director of Asian Affairs (NFI)
- Cairo: MFA Legal Advisor Muhammad Haj Hmoud
- Damascus: Ala' Jawadni (NFI)
- New York: Ambassador Srood Najib

¶2. (C) Najib said that Ala' Jawadni originally had been pegged for Cairo but is now the likely candidate for Damascus. Haj Hmoud, while on the inside track for Cairo, has passed the age of mandatory retirement but can obtain a two year extension from the Minister. Haj Hmoud is well and favorably known to post in his current role as lead GOI negotiator on the SOFA talks. Srood Najib is an urbane professional diplomat who during the Saddam era worked for the UN. He says current Iraqi permrep Hamad Bayati has embarrassed Iraq in New York and Srood is therefore eager to replace him. Ambassador Srood made no mention of a candidate for Kuwait.

¶3. (C) Comment: We caution that this information is largely on the level of in-house gossip, but it is generally consistent with the state of play as described to us several times by the Foreign Minister. The issue of Ambassadorial postings has become highly politicized and there appears to be a standoff between PM Maliki and FM Zebari. Approximately 40 names of candidates presented by the political parties were approved recently by the Cabinet but have not yet been presented to the Council of Representatives. Zebari has told us that he struggled, but not entirely successfully, to rid the original list of party nominees of those patently unqualified or unsuitable. Since the path to nomination for those 40 names will take until late summer at best, according to Zebari, he has given the PM a list of six already serving ambassadors for certain posts he wants to be able to fill immediately. According to Zebari, the Prime Minister has had that list since early June but has not acted on it. Post will continue to urge PM Maliki and FM Zebari to resolve this issue quickly so that Iraq's diplomatic presence abroad -- especially at key posts -- is at the level needed  
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